

Journeys in Baja

A photographic diary of my adventures in Mexico

By Derek Selby

Any names or characters, businesses or places, events or incidents, are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Copyright © 2025 by Derek Selby

All rights reserved

ISBN: 979-8-2868-5034-1

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, other than for review purposes.

Cover photograph © 2025 Derek Selby

All photographs in this book © 2025 Derek Selby

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	i
THE TOWN	1
THE PLANTS	31
THE INSECTS	62
THE BIRDS	105
THE MAMMALS	124
THE REPTILES	139

INTRODUCTION

The sun is hot, the wind is freezing, and we are miserable. I am writing this from the concrete picnic table of the NTC park in San Diego that we have stayed at during the day for the past year. (Last night we slept at the bus stop on a six lane road up the hill from here.) Since in this “world’s” mythology I seem to be “Odin” we have named the horrible tree (that literally throws its seed pods at us) Yggdrasil, and its resident squirrel Ratatoskr. An evil hawk sits in the dying palm tree behind me plotting to kill the squirrel. We sit across a canal from the very noisy airport. People walk by all day — some wave, but most of them scowl. We are homeless charity cases but we are alive and still able to laugh at them when appropriate.

Today Kelly is at the library finishing up sorting files relating to the information that we have collected here on products, architecture, etc. She mentioned as she was leaving that she would be including photos we took in Baja and I immediately thought these should go into a book, so we’re going to do it! In the introduction of this book I’ll refer to Kelly by the name “Derek.” In 2012, when our photographic adventures began, we were still 3 years from our project of figuring out who we actually were.

After we kicked Mike (my “husband”) out of the house, I began to explore the property on my own. Before this the very controlling Mike would follow me or complain if I went anywhere. Finally I could venture down to the pond in front of our house and just be by myself, though not entirely by myself — the area was full of birds and beautiful bugs that I began to photograph. Derek and I would take the best photo of something but then show the other one how we got the shot. If I encountered a great dragonfly (we found more than 60 different colors and patterns) I would run back and get Derek so he could photograph it also. This book contains the bugs, the birds, the town, and the surrounding valley of San Miguel and San Jose de Comondú. There was even a cat named Bob.

The photos were taken with a Canon PowerShot S50 digital camera with a built-in zoom lens. We would download the photos onto our laptop computer in the motorhome and then run back outside to see if we could get a better shot. I was able to use some of these photos to paint tiny landscapes with fabric dyes in an acrylic base (which they had bought a lot of for some reason) on the cut-off covers of Mike’s many useless books.

During that time we also worked on fiction projects, and Derek was able to publish (through Amazon.com when we relocated to San Diego) two very funny novels. Now I’m hoping Kelly can have one of them turned into a movie when we get back to our real lives. I’m amazed that we still have a sense of humor.

Caitlyn

May 7, 2025

THE TOWN



September 7, 2011

The sunrise behind our house, at about six o'clock in the morning



March 10, 2012

The town of San Miguel de Comondu, as seen from the cliffside during my first climb out of the valley



March 18, 2012

The western edge of the valley



March 18, 2012

The narrow, snake-shaped corridor between the two towns runs for just over one mile



March 18, 2012

The whole eastern face of the corridor is made of hexagonal columns of volcanic rock, about 150' tall



March 18, 2012

As the rock erodes in the weather over time, the pillars fall into the road, leaving spaces like these



March 22, 2012

The road to the old graveyard, looking over my shoulder, westward, over our property



April 15, 2012

This stream starts at a private spring and runs the whole length of the valley



April 17, 2012

Eventually, after many more miles, it drains into the Pacific Ocean



April 21, 2012

The town at night, lit only by a few small bulbs, looks like something from a zombie movie



April 21, 2012

The town square of San Miguel



April 21, 2012

The *concha* (a small convention center) was built by the government in a futile effort to boost the economy



April 22, 2012

The valley as seen from the single paved road, looking towards the Indian caves



April 22, 2012

The only paved road as it leads 25 miles through the desert to the next small town, Pancho Villa



April 26, 2012

Sunset from our house



April 27, 2012

Sunlight filtering through the roof of the poorly-built “convention center”



April 27, 2012

The sky and leaves reflecting off the creek caught my eye as I walked home



April 28, 2012

Someone is having to get creative to keep his neighbors' animals off his property



April 28, 2012

This is the top of the taller, western cliff face, on the one day when I would attempt this climb



April 28, 2012

Made it to the top! The buildings on the right are the elementary school and our house



April 28, 2012

The sunset from the other side of the cliff face



May 6, 2012

Altocumulus or “mackerel” clouds behind our house



May 10, 2012

The smaller graveyard on the road to San Isidro



May 17, 2012

The sun rising behind the main graveyard



May 17, 2012

The canyon also winds off in a second direction, due east from the house



May 17, 2012

If you keep hiking, you end up here, on top of the mesa



May 17, 2012

The same mesa, but looking the opposite direction past the palo santo trees (*Bursera graveolens*)



May 17, 2012

The sun setting behind the ocotillos (*Fouquieria splendens*) and organ pipe cacti (*Stenocereus thurberi*)



May 18, 2012

The roofs of most of the townhouses are made from split palm tree logs and dried bamboo

THE PLANTS



April 7, 2011

The first photograph I took

The intense sun seen through the branches of a Montezuma cypress tree (*Taxodium mucronatum*)



March 19, 2012

Close-up of a paperflower (*Bougainvillea glabra*)



March 20, 2012

A snake cholla (*Cylindropuntia californica*) in bloom



March 20, 2012

An orchid tree (*Bauhinia variegata*) growing in front of the local mechanic's house



March 20, 2012

A “halo white” common hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*) on the same property



March 20, 2012

The “halo pink” variant of the hollyhock



March 21, 2012

The Christmas star flower (*Hippeastrum minerva*)



March 21, 2012

The Queen Elizabeth grandiflora rose



March 21, 2012

A red-striped treasure flower (*Gazania rigens*) growing nearby



March 23, 2012

A hooded-leaf geranium (*Pelargonium cucullatum*) in San Jose, at the other end of the valley



March 23, 2012

A rock fig (*Ficus petiolaris*) can grow in a crevice of a boulder instead of dirt



March 23, 2012

Powell's swamp lily (*Crinum x powellii*) growing near the creek



April 11, 2012

A stand of bamboo growing nearby – most of the “bamboo” here is actually an evil giant reed (*Arundo donax*)



April 11, 2012

Fan palm trees (*Washingtonia robusta*) can continue growing after falling over as long as the stem is intact



April 26, 2012

This tree (species unknown) has a natural heart shape in its bark



April 27, 2012

A red frangipani (*Plumeria rubra*) in front of a house in San Miguel



April 27, 2012

A Rangoon creeper (*Combretum indicum*), native to Southeast Asia



April 27, 2012

Another frangipani, this time with only white flowers



April 27, 2012

The avocado trees (*Persea americana*) growing around the vineyard behind the elementary school



April 30, 2012

A fairy polyantha rose growing in Hilario's yard – not content with his own, he also wants to steal our house



April 30, 2012

More treasure flowers are growing next to it



May 8, 2012

The common guava (*Psidium guajava*), a fruit tree originally from the Caribbean



May 8, 2012

A row of six fan palms growing dangerously tall next to the house – it's illegal to cut them down



May 9, 2012

A small teddy bear cactus (*Cylindropuntia bigelovii*) which, when full-grown, will be completely hideous



May 9, 2012

A stand of saguaro cacti (*Carnegiea gigantea*) lining the road to San Isidro



May 9, 2012

Dried seed pods of the century plant (*Agave deserti*), which flowers once in its lifetime



May 14, 2012

A mildly toxic shrub called “leatherstem” (*Jatropha dioica*)



May 16, 2012

The apricot-colored variety of the poisonous yellow oleander (*Cascabela thevetia*)



October 21, 2012

The “Sunrise Serenade” variety of morning glory (*Ipomoea purpurea*)



December 16, 2012

A Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*) growing near the pond in front of the house

THE INSECTS



August 20, 2011

A mating pair of pipevine swallowtail butterflies (*Battus philenor*) on a paperflower bush



October 13, 2011

A common walkingstick (*Diaperomera femorata*) on the still-unfinished windowsill of our decrepit house



March 20, 2012

A black carpenter bee (*Xylocopa micans*) pollinating a hollyhock



April 11, 2012

Red harvester ants (*Pogonomyrmex barbatus*) entering their nest by a spiral ramp



April 26, 2012

A cactus longhorn beetle (*Moneilema gigas*) climbing a rock



May 17, 2012

A springwater dancer (*Argia funebris*) sitting next to the irrigation trench on the west side of the orchard



May 21, 2012

A second springwater dancer – this one lives by the center creek



May 21, 2012

A flame skimmer dragonfly (*Libellula saturata*)



June 3, 2012

Another springwater dancer – damselflies are only about one and a half inches long



June 4, 2012

A vivid dancer (*Argia vivida*)



June 4, 2012

Two dusky dancers (*Argia translata*)



June 4, 2012

The vivid dancer in another spot



June 4, 2012

Another vivid dancer at sunset



June 8, 2012

Another flame skimmer – its wingspan in real life is 3.7 inches



June 8, 2012

An American rubyspot damselfly (*Hetaerina americana*)



June 8, 2012

A filigree skimmer (*Pseudoleon superbus*) camouflaged to look like the dead leaves around it



June 14, 2012

A Mexican amberwing (*Perithemis intensa*) – I had to stand in the middle of the stream for about an hour



August 9, 2012

The female flame skimmers are brown instead of red



November 10, 2012

A variable darner (*Aeshna interrupta*) sitting on a curtain and refusing to leave



November 8, 2012

A yellow woolly bear caterpillar on my arm – given time it will become a tiger moth (*Spilosoma virginica*)



November 22, 2012

A Humphrey's spur-throated grasshopper (*Barytettix humphreysi*)



December 5, 2012

A white cabbage butterfly (*Pieris rapae*)



December 7, 2012

A red-legged grasshopper (*Melanoplus femurrubrum*), one of the most common in Mexico



December 8, 2012

Another red-legged grasshopper



December 9, 2012

The roseate skimmer (*Orthemis ferruginea*)



December 12, 2012

A sooty dancer (*Argia lugens*)



December 13, 2012

A California praying mantis (*Stagmomantis californica*) trying hard to blend in



December 15, 2012

A family of paper wasps (possibly a subspecies of *Polistes fuscatus*) building a house on a fan palm leaf



December 17, 2012

The great spreadwing (*Archilestes grandis*), a large damselfly with a 3-inch wingspan, living next to the pond



December 17, 2012

A tezpi dancer (*Argia tezpi*), a smaller damselfly, living nearby



December 17, 2012

Another filigree skimmer



December 17, 2012

A southern paper wasp (*Polistes bellicosus*), usually found in Texas



December 25, 2012
Christmas

The blue-tipped dancer (*Argia tibialis*)



January 1, 2013
New Year's Day

A third filigree skimmer – this one with an antenna-like fiber attached to his back somehow



January 1, 2013

A female roseate skimmer



January 5, 2013

A variegated meadowhawk (*Sympetrum corruptum*)



January 7, 2013

A grasshopper (probably *Chloealtis gracilis*) has found leaves the exact same color as himself to hide



January 7, 2013

This red-legged grasshopper manages to live in the cattails growing in the pond



January 12, 2013

A tule bluet (*Enallagma carunculatum*)



April 10, 2013

Another flame skimmer



April 10, 2013

A blue-eyed darner (*Rhionaeschna multicolor*) – I got much closer later, but lost the photo in the fire



April 15, 2013

A Pacific forktail (*Ischnura cervula*)

THE BIRDS



March 23, 2012

A flock of turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) in the background while one suns itself on a cactus nearby



April 26, 2012

Another flock of vultures in a flame tree (*Delonix regia*)



May 17, 2012

The vultures are now waiting in the saguaro cacti for something tasty to die



May 21, 2012

A hooded oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) sitting in an avocado tree



May 21, 2012

The vultures are now waiting next to the house



May 21, 2012

My first hummingbird (*Hylocharis xantusii*)



Jun 8, 2012

My second hummingbird (unknown species)



Dec 15, 2012

I'm getting closer to the Xantus's hummingbird



December 16, 2012

A mating pair of northern cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) in a Jerusalem thorn tree (*Parkinsonia aculeata*)



December 18, 2012

The Xantus's hummingbird feeding on rocknettle flowers by the pond



December 25, 2012

He is starting to get suspicious of us



January 1, 2013



January 1, 2013

By now he's starting to get angry – you can see it in his face



January 1, 2013



January 1, 2013



January 1, 2013



January 1, 2013



April 19, 2013

The last photo I got to keep

The rest were destroyed in the fire

A canyon wren (*Catherpes mexicanus*) on the floor of our house, wondering if I think this is funny

THE MAMMALS



March 23, 2012

A group of cows looking for food in the corridor between the towns



April 26, 2012

These cows are kept in a pen and depend on their owners for food – as a result they are visibly starving



May 14, 2012

A family of cows blocking the only way into San Miguel



May 27, 2012

Our last cat, Bob



May 28, 2012

He lives under the doorstep of the motorhome



June 2, 2012

Just relaxing



June 18, 2012

Lying in wait



June 23, 2012

Like most cats his age, he has a lot of energy



June 26, 2012

A baby horse with its parents



August 28, 2012

We weren't the only people living in the house – there was also a colony of several dozen angry bats



Oct 19, 2012

It looks like two pigs end-to-end but this is just one very long pig



March 6, 2013

Some stray kittens, who may be Bob's brothers and sisters



March 9, 2013

One of them we named Banshee – it only lived for a short time



April 5, 2013

A friendly gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) shortly after rubbing on my legs

THE REPTILES



January 7, 2013

A Cataviña brush lizard (*Urosaurus lahtelai*) warming itself on a rock



January 10, 2013

A two-striped gartersnake (*Thamnophis hammondi*) trying to look intimidating



February 15, 2013

Texas spiny lizard (*Sceloporus olivaceus*) still nervous after Bob had dropped him on a dinner plate

